



LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

America's Partner for Equal Justice

Strategic Directions

2006-2010

November 2005

Mission

The Congress of the United States, in the declaration of purpose of the Legal Services Corporation Act, found that “there is a need to provide equal access to the system of justice in our Nation for individuals who seek redress of grievances;” that “there is a need to provide high quality legal assistance to those who would be otherwise unable to afford adequate legal counsel;” and that “providing legal assistance to those who face an economic barrier to adequate legal counsel will serve best the ends of justice and assist in improving opportunities for low-income persons.” In keeping with this mandate, the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) establishes as our mission:

To promote equal access to justice in our Nation and to provide high quality civil legal assistance to low-income persons.

Goals

For the years 2006-2010, LSC establishes two strategic goals and one support goal for the organization. First, LSC grantees documented in 2005 that for every person served by their programs, one had to be turned away for lack of resources to serve them. To help achieve equal access to justice in our nation, LSC must generate awareness of and support for the provision of civil legal services to those who need them. The provision of such services may be through an LSC-funded program, through other legal aid programs, through *pro bono* work by private attorneys, or through other means, but it is essential that support be generated so that more services can be delivered. Accordingly, LSC establishes as its first strategic goal for the next five years:

Increase public awareness of and support for civil legal services to low-income persons in order to respond appropriately to more of their legal needs.

In carrying out its mission, LSC funds legal aid programs across the nation to provide legal services. These grantees provide a broad range of civil legal assistance to eligible individuals in keeping with statutory and regulatory provisions. To fulfill the mandate of Congress for high quality legal assistance, LSC establishes as its second strategic goal for the next five years:

Enhance the quality and compliance of legal services programs.

LSC is committed to supporting and monitoring grantee operations in ways that enhance program delivery without placing undue burdens on the grantees. LSC also is committed

to administering its funds in a sound and economical manner. Consistent with these commitments, LSC establishes as its support goal for the next five years:

Ensure that LSC operates efficiently and effectively.

To accomplish its goals, LSC establishes the following objectives and strategies to pursue over the next five years. LSC management will adopt an annual workplan for the organization that will assign to specific offices responsibility for yearly progress on each of the strategies. Each office will then assign responsibilities to specific individuals for strategic accomplishments. Progress toward achieving the goals will be measured using the performance measures that follow the strategy sections.

Objectives and Strategies for Achieving Goal 1

To achieve the goal of increasing public awareness of and support for civil legal services to low-income persons in order to respond appropriately to more of their legal needs, LSC establishes four objectives with specific strategies for achieving each of the objectives. The first objective is:

Objective 1: More effectively inform the public of what LSC grantees do.

If more support is to be generated for legal services for the poor, a much greater awareness of the importance and availability of legal services is needed. This will be accomplished through two strategies.

Strategies

- *Collect and distribute stories about the meaningful differences made in clients' lives*

Legal assistance helps people to improve their lives, from securing habitable homes to resolving consumer problems to resolving domestic issues. Success stories abound about people who moved forward with their lives when access to justice was provided. Some legal services cases result in reduced public expenditures, such as when housing issues with landlords are resolved and families remain in housing rather than becoming homeless, or when child support issues are resolved and financial support is provided by absent parents, or when obstacles preventing employment are resolved allowing a client to remain working. By working with grantees on how better to communicate their success stories to their local communities, LSC will achieve greater public awareness of civil legal services.

- *Continue to identify and publicize needs that are not being met*

National and statewide studies have documented that at least 80% of the legal needs of the poor are not being met through current provisions of service by legal services programs, *pro bono* assistance, or other forms of legal aid. Helping the public to understand this need is essential to increasing public support for legal services.

The second objective under goal one is:

Objective 2: Seek additional funding for legal services work.

LSC will work to secure greater resources from two sources.

Strategies

■ *The federal government*

Based on the 2005 study of those that LSC grantees were unable to serve, LSC will seek each year to increase significantly the funding provided by Congress for the provision of civil legal services to the poor. Also, LSC will work to educate federal agencies seeking to deliver services to poor people about the capacity and effectiveness of using legal aid providers when the service involves informing people of their rights or helping to resolve legal disputes.

■ *The private sector for projects of national significance*

While sensitive to the need not to compete with legal services grantees for private contributions and the need not to impact negatively federal appropriations, LSC will seek to identify projects of national significance that could merit consideration for funding from private sources and will explore support for those projects.

The third objective under goal one is:

Objective 3: As the principal leader in the legal services/access to justice community, strengthen collaborations and strategic partnerships.

To achieve more public support for legal services and to provide more services to low-income persons, LSC will reach out to other groups who share an interest in equal access to justice. Collaborations will be emphasized in seven strategic areas.

Strategies

- *With judicial organizations*

At the state and federal levels, judicial organizations can be effective advocates for ensuring equal access to justice. Through organizations such as the Center for State Courts, the Association of Chief Justices of State Supreme Courts, the Judicial Conference of the United States, LSC can help raise awareness of the need for programs and funding to assist the poor in obtaining access to justice. Over the next five years, LSC will increase its engagement with judicial organizations.

- *With IOLTA groups*

Every state in the United States, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands have rules governing lawyers' trust accounts requiring that interest on lawyers' trust accounts (IOLTA funds) be dedicated to public interest activities such as legal aid. Over the next five years, LSC will work with grantees to help increase the percentage of IOLTA funds that are dedicated to the provision of legal aid.

- *With law schools and clinics*

Law schools and clinics are significant sources of legal assistance in some areas. More can be done to encourage law professors and students to support the delivery of legal aid to the poor.

- *With private attorneys, bar associations, and corporate legal counsels*

Organizations representing attorneys can be very effective advocates on equal justice issues. LSC will continue to work with such organizations to build support for more resources dedicated to legal assistance to low-income people.

- *With state equal justice communities*

In many states, statewide organizations have been formed to promote equal access to justice. LSC will work over the next five years to assist in establishing equal access to justice commissions or other similar entities where they do not exist and to support the ongoing efforts of existing commissions.

- *With other organizations interested in the delivery of legal services*

While LSC has been active with a number of organizations who share the mission of equal access to justice, more effort needs to be made with other national organizations interested in the provision of legal services.

- *With organizations that assist with disaster recoveries*

Learning from the disaster of Hurricane Katrina, LSC will develop relationships with organizations such as the Federal Emergency Management Administration to plan for methods to assist grantees affected by disasters.

The fourth objective under goal one is:

Objective 4: Increase access to and expand ways of providing assistance.

In order to serve more needs of low-income people, legal service programs need to be better known among the potential client population, more accessible, and have more options available for delivery of services. To achieve this objective, LSC will pursue four strategies.

Strategies

- *Encourage community outreach and education by grantees about legal rights and responsibilities and the types of assistance available from legal services programs.*

As indicated by several of the legal needs surveys conducted in nine states between 2000 and 2005, many low income people not only are unaware of when their problems have a legal dimension to them, but also are unaware of the availability of free legal services to assist them. In conformity with the Congressional restriction on soliciting for clients, grantees will be encouraged to provide more outreach to their communities to make people more aware of their legal rights and responsibilities and the types of assistance available from legal services programs.

- *Use technology to expand access and availability, including through the expansion of TIG.*

To assist with outreach and availability, LSC will continue to seek financial support for technology grants and will continue to work with grantees and vendors to sustain existing websites and in other innovative ways to provide education and services through technological assistance. By expanding Technology Initiative Grants (TIG), LSC will be able to help programs continue to improve their services and their electronic systems.

- *Encourage expanded pro bono activities and contributions.*

Private attorneys provide most of the *pro bono* services that are offered to low-income people, and LSC will work with grantees and bar associations to expand the provision of *pro bono* services.

- *Participate in the continued development of systems that support more effective pro se access where appropriate.*

Given the mismatch between legal aid resources and the needs to be met, LSC will continue to work with the courts and others to improve *pro se* processes where appropriate. LSC will pursue further development of applications such as the web-based provision of *pro se* forms and will support grantees' work with state judicial systems on *pro se* access.

Objectives and Strategies for Achieving Goal 2

To achieve the goal of enhancing the quality and compliance of legal services programs, LSC adopts three objectives with a set of strategies for each objective. The first objective is:

Objective 1: Effectively use LSC performance criteria and other indicia of high-quality legal services.

The revised LSC performance criteria, the ABA Standards for Providers of Civil Legal Services to the Poor, and data from program visits and grantee reports will be used to improve the quality and compliance of legal services programs. Five specific strategies will be pursued.

Strategies

- *Encourage programs to use LSC performance criteria in program self-evaluations.*

To encourage programs to improve quality, LSC will encourage grantees to use the LSC performance criteria among the measures that programs use to evaluate themselves.

- *Use the competitive grant process to enhance program quality.*

LSC uses the competition process to choose the best applicant where there are more than one and, where there is only one applicant, to make sure that the applicant is capable of effective and efficient service delivery. As a part of the competitive grant process, LSC applies the LSC Performance Criteria and gives applicants feedback on the quality of their application and any weaknesses perceived in the planned program. Over the next five years, LSC will use the findings in the competitive grant process to work with successful applicants to improve their programs.

- *Use program visits to emphasize quality and compliance.*
LSC will increase the number of visits to grantees and will use the reports following visits to identify suggestions for quality and compliance improvements. LSC will develop a strategy for program visits that assures appropriate reviews of LSC grant funds within reasonable time limits. LSC will explore peer reviews and other evaluation and assessment options to supplement program visits.
- *Make better use of data to identify and analyze recurring issues and focus on addressing those issues.*
LSC will analyze the data collected during program visits by Office of Compliance and Enforcement (OCE) and the Office of Program Performance (OPP) and other data that LSC collects to identify issues that appear to be problems in more than one program. Appropriate training and guidance materials then will be developed and distributed on those issues.
- *Contribute to the development of the ABA Standards for Providers of Civil Legal Services to the Poor.*
LSC will continue to work with the American Bar Association (ABA) on the development of the *ABA Standards for Providers of Civil Legal Services to the Poor*.

The second objective for enhancing the quality and compliance of legal services programs is:

Objective 2: Increase training and technical assistance.

By providing training and technical assistance to grantees and their staffs, LSC will help to spread the adoption of best practices, will help grantee staff to become more effective service deliverers, and will enhance the quality of LSC programs. LSC will implement four strategies to achieve this objective.

Strategies

- *Enhance the collection and distribution of best practices information.*
Through program visits and the competitive grants process, LSC collects information on best practices among legal services programs. Through the LSC Resource Initiative (LRI), LSC disseminates this information. LSC will expand this effort and promote the adoption of best practices among LSC grantees.
- *Provide training for grantee staff on effective program operations and achieving full compliance with regulations.*
LSC, during its technical assistance and training offerings, will emphasize good management practices and achieving full compliance with LSC regulations. LSC will analyze comments received during program visits to determine in

what areas LSC guidance needs to be clearer. LSC will then clarify its policies and documentation needs where necessary. In offering training, LSC will consider regional training programs for grantees and will evaluate whether such regional programs can reach more people more quickly, thus enhancing program quality and compliance. LSC will also develop computer- and web-based training on common issues for LSC grantees and will develop other training aids such as video presentations and distance learning opportunities through remote broadcasts. By offering training in a variety of formats, LSC expects to reach more people at lower cost than through traditional on-site training programs.

- *Continue to promote the diversity of legal services providers' boards, staff and leadership.*

LSC will continue to emphasize the importance of maintaining diversity on the boards, in the leadership, and in the staffs of the grantees.

The third objective for enhancing the quality and compliance of legal services programs is:

Objective 3: Develop and enhance innovative approaches.

As evidenced by LSC's initiation of programs like TIG, LSC promotes innovative means for providing legal assistance to low-income people. Over the next five years, LSC will continue this promotion in three ways.

Strategies

- *Design, implement, and evaluate innovative means for supporting grantee program development.*

In order to assist grantees in recruiting and retaining staff, LSC has implemented a program to assist a limited number of grantee attorneys to pay off educational loans. The LRAP program will be evaluated and, if it has assisted in the recruitment and retention of legal services staff, LSC will seek to expand it. Also, in order to develop a diverse corps of future leaders for legal services programs, LSC began planning in 2005 for a model program for mentoring emerging leaders in LSC programs. If the program is successful, LSC expects to assist grantees and other organizations to establish more such programs. LSC will continue to identify new potential areas for innovative programs to support grantee development.

- *Continue emphasis on technology initiatives.*

Since 2000, Technology Initiative Grants have supported the development of new ideas such as statewide websites, kiosks for public access, and web-based *pro se* forms. LSC will continue to encourage grantees to use technology in innovative ways to improve service delivery.

- *Work to improve support for hard to serve areas and populations, e.g., rural areas, migrants, Native Americans, limited English proficiency clients.*

Programs serving hard-to-serve populations face difficult challenges in reaching potential clients, in building trust with potential clients, and in being able to follow through on identified problems. To improve quality and compliance in these programs, LSC will focus attention on innovative ways to serve such populations and will examine the special needs of programs serving such populations.

Strategies to Achieve Goal 3

To achieve the support goal of ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of LSC operations, LSC will pursue ten strategies.

Strategies

- *Develop closer collaboration between operating units of LSC.*

In order to assure that the various units of LSC communicate the same message, LSC will insure that policy and procedure communications within each office get shared with other offices. LSC will evaluate whether to conduct more joint visits with OCE and OPP to further this collaboration.

- *Conduct bottom-up reviews of LSC operations focusing on efficient practices and fiscal responsibility.*

LSC Management will examine each of the LSC operating units to review appropriate staffing and budgeting for each unit. Within the administrative units, benchmarking of LSC operations against other similar organizations will be used.

- *Encourage initiatives for cost savings.*

LSC will encourage staff to identify areas for cost savings, such as the internet travel initiative begun in 2004. Opportunities will be identified, modifications implemented, and appropriate recognition extended to the staff involved.

- *Enhance database capacities and knowledge management capabilities.*

LSC will keep its information technology (IT) operations up to date and will implement a knowledge management system as a part of its IT system.

- *Ensure timeliness of LSC written products.*

LSC will reduce the time necessary to complete its written products. Goals will be set for average times for field reports to be prepared for management, delivered to the field, and closed appropriately. Goals will also be set for posting and filling vacancies and for closing financial statements.

- *Examine and where possible streamline and simplify regulations.*

Every year, the LSC board will review the need for regulatory changes. Recommendations for simplifications for FY 2006 have already been identified.

- *Examine and, if possible, simplify and streamline data collection from grantees.*

LSC will review the data that it collects from grantees and will review data which grantees must submit to state and federal agencies. Where it is possible, LSC will revise its data collection needs to conform to data already being produced and collected for another purpose. Where appropriate, LSC will seek to get other funders to accept an LSC format. LSC will work with IOLTA representatives to determine to what extent common applications for funding can be developed so as to reduce the administrative burden on grantees of preparing different applications.

- *Add to the capacity of LSC staff by enhancing skills through training and career development.*

LSC will institute a formal plan for assessing the training and career development needs of its employees and will develop a system for assuring that such needs are addressed.

- *Make LSC a model of diversity and inclusiveness.*

As will be done with grantees, LSC will examine its own staffing and, through appropriate development and hiring, will assure that LSC is a model for diversity in staffing.

- *Review space requirements and modify as appropriate.*

LSC will benchmark its office space requirements with other similar organizations and will modify its current space requirements as appropriate.

- *Explore the development of nationwide contracts for service, e.g., technology, health care.*

LSC has been successful with one vendor in establishing a nationwide contract for services that lowered the costs to grantees for those services. LSC will seek other areas in which the economies of a national market or national pricing policies will be of advantage to grantees and will pursue such contracts.

LSC STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS, 2006-2010

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Measuring LSC's progress in attaining the goals set forth in this Strategic Directions document will be a challenge. Most of the measurements identified here are at best indirect measures of the impact of LSC activity. For many measures, baselines have yet to be established. Some of the measures need further refinement before being useful as performance measures, and in some areas performance measures have yet to be developed. During 2006, LSC will further develop performance measures in order to monitor better the organization's progress between 2006 and 2010.

Goal 1: Increase public awareness of and support for civil legal services to low-income persons in order to respond appropriately to more of their legal needs

To measure LSC's success in achieving the first strategic goal, the goal has been divided into its three elements: raising public awareness, increasing support, and serving more needs. Two measures have been adopted for measuring public awareness.

Performance Measures

- *Count of media articles.*

This count will include articles from every media outlet tracked by LSC's clipping service. An increase in articles published will be considered as an indirect indication of an increase in public awareness.

- *Collective visits to legal services websites.*

As a measure of public awareness of the availability of legal services, LSC will count the number of page loads of LSC and grantee websites. Page loads require more time than mere "hits" on websites and are a more appropriate measure of interest by the viewer. An increase in the number of page loads will be considered an indication of increased public awareness of legal services.

To measure increasing support for legal services, one performance measures has been adopted:

- *Total funding nationwide to support equal access work.*

The total funding measure will include total dollars appropriated by Congress for the year, the collective amount of other federal grants reported by grantees on an annual basis, the collective amount of private funding reported by grantees and LSC on an annual basis, the annual amount and percentage of IOLTA dollars nationwide that are appropriated for legal services work and the collective amount of state funding, including appropriations and fees. Funding will be reported collectively for LSC grantees, and collectively for non-grantees to the extent that non-grantee information is available.

To measure the element of responding to more needs, LSC will use three performance measures:

- *Periodic nationwide counts of potential clients whom grantees are unable to serve.*

In 2005, LSC asked grantees to count the number of potential clients that they were unable to serve because of a lack of resources. While LSC will not pursue such counts on an annual basis, a count every five years will be used to measure success in serving more of the people who ask for the help of legal services programs.

- *Analysis of Case Service Report data and types of cases.*

Grantees report to LSC on an annual basis the number and types of cases which they handle. LSC will provide an annual report of this data and indicate year-to-year changes which measure the level of services provided.

- *Number of downloads of forms from grantee websites.*

As grantees provide more support for *pro se* filings, potential clients will be using more of the *pro se* forms made available on grantee websites. LSC will consider the total number of *pro se* forms downloaded annually as a measure of providing assistance to *pro se* litigants.

Goal 2: Enhance the quality and compliance of legal services programs

Outcome measures

In considering outcome measures, LSC recognizes that the ultimate measure is whether grantees obtain successful outcomes for their clients. The definition of success, however, is not simple. Even where a case goes to trial, the outcome may be viewed as successful by some but not by others. In simpler matters where an attorney provides brief advice, the attorney has no way of knowing if the client followed the advice or if the outcome was successful.

LSC has been discussing outcome measures with grantees and will continue to encourage grantees to identify methods for measuring outcomes for their clients. LSC will collect and share the outcome measures developed by grantees to promote their use by legal services programs. Since priorities and state laws (and therefore the desired outcomes) vary from grantee to grantee, national outcome measures are difficult to establish. While grantees generally conduct some form of client follow-up such as client satisfaction surveys, surveys provide limited information by which to assess the quality of legal assistance provided.

LSC will continue over the next five years to work on appropriate means to measure successful outcomes for LSC programs. Until such time as appropriate outcome measures are developed, LSC will track performance measures for quality and compliance.

Performance measures

Goal two is divided into two areas for performance measures, quality and compliance. LSC has adopted five indicators of quality in the delivery of legal services.

- *LSC performance criteria measures.*

LSC performance criteria are the means LSC is using to emphasize quality in LSC programs. LSC will develop methods of measuring and reporting on these criteria, and then use those methods to produce performance measures for Goal 2.

- *Scores on competitive grant evaluations.*

LSC uses its performance criteria measures to score applications for competitive grant awards. Over a three-year period, every grant will be open to competition. While year-to-year scores may vary depending upon which grants are being competed, the trend in scores over time will be considered an indication of the level of program quality of grantees competing for awards.

- *Diversity numbers for grantee boards, leadership, and staff.*

Grantees annually report to LSC on the diversity characteristics of their staff, leadership, and boards. This information will be aggregated and reported as a quality indicator for LSC programs.

- *Grantee attorney retention.*

Retention of experienced attorneys will be considered a measure of quality in staffing. LSC will report annually on the average length of service for all grantee attorney staff nationwide.

- *Amount of training provided for grantee staff.*

LSC will collect from grantees during the competitive award process the training provided to grantee staff. A well-trained staff being an indicator of a quality program, LSC will consider the amount of training provided as an indicator of program quality.

As indicators of compliance, LSC has adopted three performance measures:

- *Number of technical assistance and training sessions conducted by LSC.*

In order to assist grantees to achieve and remain in compliance with laws and regulations governing legal services operations, LSC conducts training sessions for grantee staff. LSC will count and report on these sessions on an annual basis. The level of training sessions provided will be considered an indicator of LSC's compliance efforts.

- *Percent of in-compliance findings from OCE visits.*

During program visits by OCE staff, grantees are evaluated on whether they are in compliance on a list of regulatory items. The aggregate percentage of findings that are in compliance will be reported annually by LSC and considered as an indicator of the level of compliance by legal services programs with laws and regulations.

- *Timeliness and degree of resolution of OCE corrective action notices.*

When items are found during program visits that are not in compliance, corrective action items are made part of the draft and final reports sent to programs. The average length of time for a program to resolve a corrective action notice will be considered an indicator of commitment to compliance by LSC grantees. In addition, the extent to which a program has implemented necessary change, as well as the level of proof obtained by LSC to support full compliance, will be considered indicators of the success in improving noted compliance issues.

Goal 3: Ensure that LSC operates efficiently and effectively

Support goal three is divided into two parts for measurement purposes: efficiency and effectiveness. To measure efficiency, LSC has adopted three performance measures.

Performance Measures

- *Average lapsed time for LSC report production.*

LSC will measure the average time from program visits to issuing draft reports (in OCE) or program visit reports (in OPP) as a measure of efficiency.

- *Achieve conformance with benchmark staffing levels for administrative staff.*

LSC will measure efficiency in its administrative units by reporting on benchmark levels of staffing for LSC *vis-a-vis* other similar organizations on a periodic basis.

- *Achieve conformance with benchmark office space requirements.*

LSC will benchmark its space needs against other similar organizations and report on its conclusions on a periodic basis.

To measure effectiveness, LSC has adopted four performance measures:

- *Diversity of LSC staff and leadership.*

As with grantees, LSC will report annually on the diversity of its staff and leadership.

- *Amount of training provided for LSC staff where needs have been assessed.*

LSC will report annually on the amount of training, including technology training, provided for its staff. The number of training opportunities will be

considered an indicator of the effectiveness of LSC staff in performing their jobs.

- *Administrative costs as a percentage of the total LSC appropriation.*

In keeping with how some other non-profit organizations measure administrative effectiveness, LSC will report annually on its administrative costs as a percentage of the total LSC appropriation.

- *Achieve conformance with benchmark IT sophistication levels.*

Effective organizations must maintain a modern information technology infrastructure. LSC will benchmark itself against other similar organizations and biannually report on its conclusions as an indicator of effectiveness.